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ABSTRACT

Preliminary findings from a study of black student retention and progression in higher education are reported. The findings are based on the responses of eight public and private universities to an Institutional Data Questionnaire (IDQ). Analysis of the IDQ shows that, overall, white students perform better than black students in terms of their college attrition rates, their tendency to follow the prescribed progression pattern, and the length of time they take to graduate. However, these relationships change significantly when the racial composition of the colleges the students attend is taken into account. At predominantly white colleges, white students perform better than black students in terms of both attrition and progression patterns. At predominantly black universities, on the other hand, black students show a greater tendency to persist and follow the prescribed progression pattern than whites. At the same time, however, both black and white students tend to perform better at predominantly white institutions than at predominantly black institutions. Differences between black and white students' attrition and progression patterns are discussed. (Author/MSE)

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STUDENT PROGRESSION AND ATTRITION IN COLLEGE: DOES RACE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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Introduction

With the advent of the civil rights movement, increased access to what had been a predominantly white higher education system became a primary concern for black students seeking a college degree. As the struggle for equal educational opportunity grew in intensity during the late 1960s and early 1970s, differential access became a major focus of educational policy and research. Since that time, however, black attendance at institutions of higher education has increased dramatically--from 5 percent of total enrollments in 1966 to 11 percent in 1979--and current research shows that by the late 1970s, proportionately as many blacks were beginning postsecondary schooling as whites (McPartland, 1978). In fact, when socioeconomic status and standardized test performance are statistically controlled, blacks now have a higher college enrollment rate than whites (Thomas, 1981b). This has resulted in significant changes in the racial and socioeconomic composition of college student bodies, and in a concomitant shift in research focus toward other aspects of the equal educational opportunity issue. Specifically, the increase in black student enrollments and growing recognition that data on comparative enrollment rates do not permit conclusions "concerning the advantages and disadvantages that blacks and whites experience in higher education beyond the point of entry" (Thomas, 1981b, 59) have led to increasing emphasis on the differential attrition rates of black and white college students. Research in this area has shown that the gap in black and white enrollment increases over the

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college years, because more blacks than whites withdraw from college, particularly after the first and second years (Allen, 1981; Cross & Astin, 1981; McPartland, 1978; Ramist, 1981; Thomas, 1980). Since the mid 1970s, educational research has largely centered on the reasons for these differential attrition rates, both for black and white students and for college students as a whole, and hundreds of articles have been written on the determinants of college persistence (e.g., see Pantages & Creedon, 1978).

The multitude of research on college attrition has been important for efforts to desegregate higher education, as it has underscored the fact that ensuring equal access to higher education in no way ensures equality of the educational experience. Moreover, in recent years increasing attention has been paid to the college environment (and students' social and academic integration into that environment), and to how that environment affects students' persistence in college (e.g., Jones, 1979; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Pfeifer, 1976). These studies are especially valuable for understanding students' experiences in college and for identifying the problems black students have in adjusting to the nonaccommodating environment of predominantly white universities (e.g., Mingle, 1978). However, by focusing primarily on students who drop out of college in comparison to those who remain, even this contextual research has, for the most part, failed to differentiate the college experiences of black and white students in general and identify the effects those experiences have on students' progression throughout their college career (however long it may be).

Therefore, the purpose of the present research effort is to move beyond studies of the determinants of differential persistence rates for black and white students, and on to the question of whether black students (including both those who will ultimately withdraw from college and those who will persist until they graduate) tend to progress at a slower pace than white students, and,

if so, what factors bring about these differential progression rates. Only by answering those questions will we be able to fully understand the totality of the academic and social experiences offered black and white college students and the effects those experiences have on students' ability to progress in college.

Description of the Present Study

The present study of the causes and consequences of differential student progression rates in higher education stems from efforts by one state higher education system to effectively desegregate undergraduate student enrollments in its state colleges and universities. Because of the paucity of other research on differential progression rates, the study has been designed to address several facets of the progression issue, including:

(1) what normal (or average) progression in higher education is;

(2) what factors are associated with various rates of progression; and

(3) whether progression rates have any consequences for students' ability to obtain employment in the public and private sectors or admissions into graduate school.

Twenty-four colleges and universities in eight Southern and border states have been selected for participation in the study. Six institutions were chosen from each of the four following categories:

(1) Large public universities with a broad array of degree programs through the doctoral level;

(2) Historically predominantly black public universities;

(3) Regional public universities with limited graduate programs; and

(4) Private universities with broad degree offerings including graduate and professional programs.

The basic criteria used in selecting institutions in each of the categories were type of degree programs offered, total number of students enrolled, and whether there were a sufficient number of black and white students to permit analysis of both races at each university.

Data collection for this study will be conducted in five phases and utilizing several survey instruments. The first phase involves the collection of group-level data from the institutions involved in the study through an Institutional Data Questionnaire (IDQ). The IDQ is divided into four sections. The first section provides information, by race, on total undergraduate enrollment; SAT and ACT scores for several cohorts of entering freshmen; and the actual progression rates for several cohorts of students (the latter comprise the basis of this paper and are explained in more detail in tne next section). The second section of the IDQ identifies how many black and white students receive financial aid (and of what type and amount), and the third section indicates the number of black and white students who live on- and off-campus. Finally, section four concerns the teaching and administrative personnel of each university, and asks each university to specify the major fields of study for their faculty by race, and the racial composition of the total faculty and administrative staff.[1]

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[1]Phases two through five of the study will involve the collection of individual-level data from students and faculty at the sample universities. Through a mailed questionnaire to approximately 10,000 students (Phase II) and personal interviews with a subset of responding students (Phase IV), information will be collected on students' class level and the length of time it took them to get to that point; stop-out or transfer behavior; demographic and academic background; academic motivation; method of financing college; and academic and social integration into the college environment. Faculty perceptions of normal progression and of the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors that contribute to success in college will be collected via a mailed questionnaire (Phase III) and personal interviews (Phase IV). Information will also be collected on the

This paper presents the preliminary findings from our analysis of the Institutional Data Questionnaire. Because only one-third of the universities in our sample have responded to the questionnaire at this point in time, the analyses presented here are limited to a comparison of the length of time it took black and white students in our sample to graduate, and the proportions of each group who followed the prescribed class progression pattern (sophomore in the second year, junior in the third year, senior in the fourth year, and graduate after the fourth year). We also compare attrition rates for the two groups to ensure that our findings are in line with the results of other research studies and to present a total picture of black and white students' performance patterns. Finally, we compare the attrition and progression patterns of black and white students attending predominantly white and predominantly black universities to determine whether overall differences persist when the type of institutions students attend is taken into account. As our data collection efforts continue, we will perform analyses that will enable us to identify which aspects of students' backgrounds and college environments contribute to their differential progression rates and overall progression patterns. In addition, later analyses will allow us to more fully address the issue of whether black students in general (not just those who eventually graduate) tend to progress more slowly than white students, and the effects different progression rates have on black and white students' ability to obtain employment or admission into graduate school.

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types and amount of interaction faculty have with different types of students. Finally, college recruiters and graduate admissions officers will be interviewed (Phase V) to determine the emphasis they place on college progression rates in making hiring or admissions decisions.

Findings

Many studies have shown that black students in four-year colleges and universities experience higher attrition rates than white students (Allen, 1981; Cross & Astin, 1981; McPartland, 1978; Ramist, 1981; Thomas, 1980). Blacks are also less likely to persist full-time, and consequently have lower four-year completion rates than whites (Astin, 1973; Cross & Astin, 1981; McPartland, 1978; Thomas, 1981a). However, some research has shown that the magnitude of the racial difference in college completion rates decreases somewhat if completion subsequent to the prescribed four years is taken into account (Thomas, 1981a). This is largely due to the fact that blacks engage in proportionately more part-time and interrupted schooling than whites, and blacks who graduate from college generally take longer to do so (I.S.E.P, 1976; McPartland, 1978; Thomas, 1981a).

The findings presented here confirm the existence of significant differences between black and white students in terms of the proportion who follow the prescribed progression pattern, attrition, and mean length of time to graduate. Our conclusions are derived from the responses of five predominantly white universities (three large state universities, one relatively non-selective regional university and one highly selective private university) and three predominantly black state universities to the Institutional Data Questionnaire described earlier. Specifically, all universities in the sample were asked to track three cohorts of entering freshmen (1975, 1976, and 1977) through the fall of 1981. For each cohort of entering students, the universities provided data on the number of students enrolled as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors in the fall of their second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, (1975 and 1976 cohorts only) and seventh (1975 cohorts only) years after matriculation. Data were also provided on the numbers of students in each cohort who dropped out (defined to include transfers,

voluntary withdrawals and involuntary withdrawals) or graduated during each of the study years. In addition to providing these data for all students combined, the universities also tracked black and white students separately. Thus, for each university in the sample, data are available on six independent cohorts of entering students (blacks entering in 1975, whites entering in 1975, etc.), as well as on all students matriculating in each of the three study years.

The results of our analysis of these group-level data are summarized in tables 1-8. Tables 1-3 present data on our three measures of performance for all students combined, and compare the black and white cohorts of students across all universities in the sample. Tables 4-8 then summarize the same data for several subgroups of black and white students. Tests of statistical significance for between-group differences were performed and are included in the tables; however, any racial differences revealed in the tables are significant in the context of these eight universities, since entire populations of entering cohorts were utilized.

Table 1 shows the mean percentage of students in all cohorts who followed the prescribed college progression pattern: 56.1 percent of entering freshmen were sophomores in the fall of their second year, 42.3 percent were juniors in the fall of their third year, 38.2 percent were seniors in the fall of their fourth year, and 42.6 percent graduated after 4 years. Another 12.6 percent graduated after their fifth year. Table 1 also compares the progression patterns of black and white student cohorts, and shows that white students exhibited a significantly greater tendency to follow the prescribed progression pattern at all stages of their college career. On the average, white students were 18.4 percent more likely than blacks to be sophomores in the fall of their second year, 13.8 percent more likely to be juniors in the fall of their third year, and 13.6 percent more likely to be seniors in the fall of their fourth year. In terms of graduation

TABLE 1

MEAN PERCENT FOLLOWING PRESCRIBED
PROGRESSION PATTERN (GROUPED DATA)

Mean Percent Who Were:	All Students	Black Students	White Students
Sophomores in Fall of 2nd year	56.1%	43.0%	61.4%*
Juniors in Fall of 3rd year	42.3	32.2	46.0*
Seniors in Fall of 4th year	38.2	28.4	42.0*
Graduated in 4 years	42.6	29.2	46.5*
Graduated in 5 years	55.2	33.7	60.2*

*White mean significantly greater than black mean at .001 level of significance using two-tailed Student's t-test.

rates, whites were an average of 17.3 percent more likely to graduate within four years, and 26.5 percent more likely to graduate within five years. Altogether, only one-third of all black students had graduated from college five years after their initial enrollment, in comparison to almost two-thirds of the white students.

As Table 2 shows, these differences in class progression and graduation rates are at least partially due to black students' significantly greater tendency to drop out of college. An average of 16.5 percent of the white students had dropped out by the end of their first year, but 26.6 percent of the black students dropped out during the same time period. By the end of the fifth year, the white and black attrition rates had increased to 38.0 and 56.8 percent, respectively.

Not only were black students more likely to drop out of school than their white counterparts, but those who did graduate took significantly longer to do so. Table 3 shows that, for students who graduated within five years, blacks took an average of 4.31 years to graduate, in comparison to 4.21 years for whites. The difference is even larger when we look at six-year graduation rates: blacks who graduated within six years took an average of 4.45 years, whereas whites took an average of only 4.27 years.

The data in tables 1-3 show that there are, in fact, significant differences between black and white students in terms of their attrition and progression patterns in college. In an attempt to determine whether these differences persist in different types of institutional settings, we computed the same comparative progression and attrition rates for students attending predominantly white (Table 4) and predominantly black (Table 5) universities. Interestingly, we found that overall racial differences do not persist consistently in either predominantly white or predominantly black universities. Table 4 shows that at predominantly white universities, whites were more likely than blacks to follow

TABLE 2

MEAN DROPOUT RATES (GROUPED DATA)

Mean Percent Who:	All Students	Black Students	White Students
Dropped Out by End of 1st year	18.9%	26.6%	16.5%*
Dropped Out by End of 2nd year	30.4	39.4	27.6*
Dropped Out by End of 4th year	38.2	50.3	34.4*
Dropped Out by End of 5th year	41.5	56.8	38.0*

*White mean significantly less than black mean at .001 level of significance using two-tailed Student's t-test.

TABLE 3

MEAN PROGRESSION RATES
(YEARS TO GRADUATE) (GROUPED DATA)

Mean Years to Graduate for:	All Students	Black Students	White Students
Students Who Graduated Within 5 Years (1975 and 1976 Cohorts)	4.23	4.31	4.21*
Students Who Graduated Within 6 Years (1975 Cohorts Only)	4.30	4.45	4.27*

*White mean significantly less than black mean at .001 level of significance using two-tailed Student's t-test.

TABLE 4

COMPARISON OF BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS
ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE
INSTITUTIONS (GROUPED DATA)

Performance Variable	Blacks at White Institutions	Whites at White Institutions
Prescribed Progression Pattern		
Mean % Who Were Sophomores in Fall of 2nd Year	52.6%	62.1%
Mean % Who Were Juniors in Fall of 3rd Year	43.2	46.6
Mean % Who Were Seniors in Fall of 4th Year	37.0	42.8
Mean % Who Graduated in 4 Years	38.8	47.0**
Mean % Who Graduated in 5 Years	50.0	60.8**
Dropout Rates		
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 1st Year	16.7%	15.8%
Mean % Who Dropped Out By End of 2nd Year	26.4	26.9
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 4th Year	43.0**	33.7
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 5th Year	43.4**	33.7
Progression Rates		
Mean Years to Graduate for Students Who Graduated Within 5 Years (1975 and 1976 Cohorts)	4.19	4.21
Mean Years to Graduate for Students Who Graduated Within 6 Years (1975 Cohorts Only)	4.28	4.28

NOTE: Some large between-group differences fail to attain significance because of the large standard deviations involved.

**Significantly greater at .05 level of significance using two-tailed Student's t-test.

the prescribed progression pattern throughout their college career; however, the differences between black and white students were much smaller than those shown in Table 1. Similarly, while white students were significantly less likely to have dropped out by the end of their fourth or fifth year, their first and second year attrition patterns were almost identical to those of black students. Most surprisingly, white and black students graduating from predominantly white institutions showed almost identical progression rates. In fact, for students who graduated within five years, blacks tended to graduate in a slightly shorter period of time than whites.

Most of the relationships are reversed for students attending predominantly black universities (Table 5). At predominantly black institutions, black students were much less likely to drop out than white students (the white students showed a very high attrition rate), and were more likely to follow the prescribed progression pattern. Black students also graduated at a higher rate than white students, but both groups showed far lower graduation rates than students at predominantly white institutions. Interestingly, however, white students at black universities actually showed faster progression rates than their black counterparts. In other words, white students at predominantly black universities who managed to persist until graduation actually performed favorably compared to black students at the same institutions.

In conclusion to this point, large apparent racial differences in students' progression and attrition patterns diminish or reverse in direction when the racial composition of the schools they attend is taken into account. To determine the overall impact of school racial composition on student performance, and whether school racial composition differentially affects the performance of black and white students, we also compared the progression and attrition

TABLE 5

COMPARISON OF BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS
ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY BLACK
INSTITUTIONS (GROUPED DATA)

Performance Variable	Blacks at Black Institutions	Whites at Black Institutions
Prescribed Progression Pattern		
Mean % Who Were Sophomores in Fall of 2nd Year	41.8%	36.1%
Mean % Who Were Juniors in Fall of 3rd Year	30.8	26.5
Mean % Who Were Seniors in Fall of 4th Year	27.4	14.9
Mean % Who Graduated in 4 Years	27.0	18.7
Mean % Who Graduated in 5 Years	28.6	25.9
Dropout Rates		
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 1st Year	28.9%	54.8%
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 2nd Year	42.4	67.4
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 4th Year	52 0	77.3
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 5th Year	61.0	Not Available
Progression Rates		
Mean Years to Graduate for Students Who Graduated Within 5 Years (1975 and 1976 Cohorts)	4.35	4.28
Mean Years to Graduate for Students Who Graduated Within 6 Years (1975 Cohorts Only)	4.53*	4.25

NOTE: Several very large between-group differences fail to attain significance because of the small N's and large standard deviations involved.

*Significantly greater at .001 level of significance using two-tailed Student's t-test.

patterns of students attending predominantly black and white institutions. Table 6 compares all students attending black universities with all students attending white universities, and tables 7 and 8 compare whites (Table 7) and blacks (Table 8) attending the two types of instututions.

Table 6 shows that, overall, students attending predominantly black universities were less likely to follow the prescribed progression pattern than students attending predominantly white universities. Students at black universities also had significantly higher attrition rates and slower progression rates than students at white universities. Only one-fourth of the students at black universities graduated within four years, in comparison to almost one-half of the students at white universities. The proportions increased to 28.6 percent and 60.0 percent, respectively, by the end of five years. Conversely, over one-half of the students at black institutions had dropped out by the end of their fourth year, in comparison to only one-third of the students at white institutions. And students at predominantly black universities took, on the average, almost a quarter of a year longer to graduate than students at predominantly white universities.

The college "fit" theory states that the greater the congruence between students' goals, values and attitudes and those of the colleges they attend, the more likely they are to perform successfully in terms of persistence and academic achievement (Allen, 1981; Pantages & Creedon, 1978). According to this theory, which appears to be supported by much of the attrition research performed to date, we would expect to find that whites perform better at predominantly white universities and blacks perform better at predominantly black universities. Table 7 shows that white students at predominantly white institutions do, in fact, perform better than whites at predominantly black institutions in terms of both relative attrition rates and the proportion who follow the prescribed progression

TABLE 6

COMPARISON OF ALL STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY BLACK AND PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS (GROUPED DATA)

Performance Variable	Students at Black Institutions	Students at White Institutions
Prescribed Progression Pattern		
Mean % Who Were Sophomores in Fall of 2nd Year	41.7%	61.7%*
Mean % Who Were Juniors in Fall of 3rd Year	30.9	46.6*
Mean % Who Were Seniors in Fall of 4th Year	26.4	42.6*
Mean % Who Graduated in 4 Years	26.8	46.4*
Mean % Who Graduated in 5 Years	28.6	60.0*
Dropout Rates		
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 1st Year	30.8%*	15.9%
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 2nd Year	44.0*	26.9
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 4th Year	54.7*	34.3
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 5th Year	Not Available	34.4
Progression Rates		
Mean Years to Graduate for Students Who Graduated Within 5 Years (1975 and 1976 Cohorts)	4.34*	4.21
Mean Years to Graduate for Students Who Graduated Within 6 Years (1975 Cohorts Only)	4.49*	4.28

*Significantly greater at .001 level of significance using two-tailed Student's t-test.

TABLE 7

COMPARISON OF WHITE STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY BLACK AND PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS (GROUPED DATA)

Performance Variable	Whites at Black Institutions	Whites at White Institutions
Prescribed Progression Pattern		
Mean % Who Were Sophomores in Fall of 2nd Year	36.1%	62.1%
Mean % Who Were Juniors in Fall of 3rd Year	26.5	46.6
Mean % Who Were Seniors in Fall of 4th Year	14.8	42.8**
Mean % Who Graduated in 4 Years	18.7	47.0
Mean % Who Graduated in 5 Years	25.9	60.8
Dropout Rates		
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 1st Year	54.8%	15.8%
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 2nd Year	67.4**	26.9
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 4th Year	77.3	33.7
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 5th Year	Unavailable	33.7
Progression Rates		
Mean Years to Graduate for Students Who Graduated Within 5 Years (1975 and 1976 Cohorts)	4.28	4.21
Mean Years to Graduate for Students Who Graduated Within 6 Years (1975 Cohorts Only)	4.25	4.27

NOTE: Several very large between-group differences fail to attain significance because of the large standard deviations involved.

**Significantly greater at .05 level of significance using two-tailed Student's t-test.

pattern. (As noted earlier, whites at black institutions do extremely poorly on these measures of performance.) White progression rates, on the other hand, do not vary by type of institution, suggesting that whites who do graduate are consistent in the length of time they take to do so. However, our findings concerning black students do not appear to support the college fit theory, and contradict other studies which show that predominantly black universities tend to retain and graduate a higher proportion of black students than predominantly white universities (Thomas, 1980). It is clear from Table 8 that in our study, blacks attending predominantly white universities were far more likely to follow the prescribed progression pattern, persist in college, and graduate promptly than blacks attending predominantly black universities.

Discussion

Our findings show that, on the whole, white students performed better than black students in terms of their college attrition rates, their tendency to follow the prescribed progression pattern, and the length of time they took to graduate. However, these relationships changed significantly when the racial composition of the colleges the students attended was taken into account: at predominantly white universities, white students performed better than black students on two of our three performance measures (attrition and progression pattern), but did not graduate in a significantly shorter period of time. At predominantly black institutions, on the other hand, black students showed a greater tendency to persist and follow the prescribed progression pattern than whites. Again, however, the comparative progression rates were not as expected, with those whites who graduated from black institutions actually taking a shorter mean length of time to do so than blacks at the same institutions. In spite of this apparent interaction effect between type of institution

TABLE 8

COMPARISON OF BLACK STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY BLACK AND PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS (GROUPED DATA)

Performance Variable	Blacks at Black Institutions	Blacks at White Institutions
Prescribed Progression Pattern		
Mean % Who Were Sophomores in Fall of 2nd Year	41.8%	52.6%
Mean % Who Were Juniors in Fall of 3rd Year	30.8	43.2
Mean % Who Were Seniors in Fall of 4th Year	27.4	37.0
Mean % Who Graduated in 4 Years	27.0	38.8**
Mean % Who Graduated in 5 Years	28.6	50.0*
Dropout Rates		
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 1st Year	28.9%*	16.7%
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 2nd Year	42.4*	26.4
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 4th Year	52.0**	43.0
Mean % Who Dropped Out by End of 5th Year	61.0*	43.4
Progression Rates		
Mean Years to Graduate for Students Who Graduated Within 5 Years (1975 and 1976 Cohorts)	4.35*	4.19
Mean Years to Graduate for Students Who Graduated Within 6 Years (1975 Cohorts Only)	4.53**	4.28

NOTE: Several very large between-group differences fail to attain significance because of the large standard deviations involved.

*Significantly greater at .001 level of significance using two-tailed Student's t-test.

**Significantly greater at .05 level of significance.

(i.e., racial composition) and race, both black and white students tended to perform better at predominantly white institutions than at predominantly black institutions.

There are a number of factors that probably explain the apparent differences between black and white students' attrition and progression patterns. Specifically, the literature consistently shows that academic factors, including high school grade point average, high school class rank, and scholastic aptitude, are among the most significant predictors of college performance (Astin & Cross, 1981; Beal & Noel, 1980; Cross & Astin, 1981; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Pfeifer, 1976; Ramist, 1981). Moreover, studies generally find no differences in the attrition rates of black and white students (progression studies are virtually nonexistent) when their academic backgrounds and scholastic ability are statistically controlled (Astin, 1973; Ramist, 1981; Selby, 1973). Black students are also more likely than whites to come from social and economic backgrounds that may contribute to a lack of success in college (Cross & Astin, 1981; Jones, 1979; Ramist, 1981; Selby, 1973). Most importantly, two-thirds of all black students attend predominantly white colleges, where they are likely to experience racial prejudice and lack of academic and social integretion, which recent research has found to be significantly related to performance even with the effects of academic and background factors statistically controlled (Jones, 1979; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Pfeifer, 1976). Mingle (1978) found that the majority of faculty members at predominantly white universities have made no special response to the dramatic increase in black undergraduate enrollment since the late 1960s in terms of their time allocation, manner of teaching, or curriculum, and most admit that they interact less with their black students than their white students. In short,

> ...black student academic achievements suffer because of the difficulties they experience adjusting to the foreign environments presented by white colleges...the colleges in question experience commensurate difficulties adjusting their norms, structures, and practices to incorporate black students. A major premise derived from this set of assumptions is that a poor fit exists between black students and predominantly white colleges or universities (Allen, 1981, 127).

At the same time, however, we have shown that black students at predominantly white universities perform significantly better than black students at predominantly black universities. This may be partially due to differences in the types of black students who attend predominantly white and black universities: studies have shown that blacks attending predominantly white universities generally score higher on standardized achievement tests and have better high school academic records than blacks attending predominantly black universities (Astin & Cross, 1981). Thus, there may be an interaction effect between type of student and school racial composition in their effect on student performance. In other words, while our data suggest that there is a statistical advantage to attending a white university, we do not know if this holds true for all black students, or if it holds true only for black students with certain social and academic backgrounds. Moreover, at least for some black students, the advantages of attending a white institution may in large part be mitigated by the alien and nonaccommodating college environment.

Unfortunately, with the data at hand we are not able to explore possible explanations for the racial differences in attrition and progression patterns by controlling for differences in students' ability and background. While the

number of students on whom we have data is large, the number of responding universities (and, therefore, the number of cohorts for whom data are available) is small. We are still in the data collection phase of our research efforts, and we will see if racial differences in performance persist, particularly with the effects of other background and environmental factors statistically controlled, when the remainder of the universities in our sample have responded to our group-level questionnaire.

We also hope that the remaining group-level data, as well as the individual-level data we will be collecting shortly, will shed additional light on our findings concerning differential progression rates for black and white students. To reiterate, we found that white students had faster progression rates than black students overall, and that this relationship persisted at predominantly black institutions. But black and white progression rates were virtually identical at predominantly white institutions. In the introduction to this paper, we emphasized that differential progression rates are as important as differential attrition rates in understanding the type and quality of college experiences offered black and white students. That is, the question that is becoming more and more crucial for attempts to desegregate higher education is not whether blacks are more likely to drop out of college than whites (which we know to be the case), but whether those black students who persist have academic and social experiences comparable to those of white students. While the progression rate data presented here appear to suggest that may be the case, our findings must be interpreted with some caution because of the manner in which we have measured progression. Specifically, we have data only for individuals who graduated within five or six years (five years for most cohorts), and blacks are more likely than whites to take longer than that to graduate (I.S.E.P., 1976;

McPartland, 1978; Thomas, 1981a). Moreover, with progression defined as length of time to graduate, it necessarily excludes a majority of black students (only around 30 percent of the black students in our sample actually graduated) and over a third of all white students (whites showed a graduation rate of around 60 percent). It is highly possible that those black students who are able to persist in college until graduation (particularly at white universities) differ significantly from other black students. If so, their experiences in college cannot be construed as reflecting the experiences of black students in general. We have no way of testing this hypothesis with the group-level data at hand. However, in our individual-level questionnaire, which will be administered to 10,000 students at our sample universities, we will define progression not as the length of time to graduate, but as the length of time it takes each student to get to her or his present class level (sophomore, junior, or senior) relative to the time it takes other students in the sample to reach the same class level. In that way we will be able to derive comparable progression rates for all types of black and white students, not just those who persist until graduation. This will enable us to make more definitive conclusions about the totality of experiences offered black and white students at different types of collegiate institutions.

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